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GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION**



HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

American Sunday-School Union

AND OF ITS

CONTRIBUTIONS TO POPULAR EDUCATION

IN THE

UNITED STATES.

1865.

THE JOURNAL OF THE

1888

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IN surveying the various agencies for the diffusion of intelligence, and for the inculcation of the elementary principles of religion and morality, especially in the pioneer settlements of the country, the eye rests with no little satisfaction on one of the oldest of our national societies, THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION. There are conflicting claims to the honour of having established the first Sunday-school in the United States, but the institution was well known, and in high esteem in our cities and chief country towns, in the early part of the present century ; and although local associations were organized in many districts for their improvement and extension, there was no bond of union nor any common medium through which to diffuse widely whatever encouragement the progress of the enterprise might reveal. It was obvious that the object in view was of common interest to all classes of the community, and to all denominations of Christians, and that, in its prosecution, there could be co-operation without compromise.

The idea of a national union originated with the friends of Sunday-schools in New York, and as there was then an organization in Philadelphia, known as the Sunday and Adult School Union, already six or seven years old, and embodying the grand principles on which it was proposed to establish a national institution, it was thought expedient to build upon that; and accordingly in May, 1824, the new society was formed, and the old Society's stock of books, &c, (in value about five thousand dollars,) was transferred to it.

In one of their earliest addresses to the public, the managers of the new Society urge the formation of auxiliary unions in each of the States, and invite general co-operation "in placing the means of learning to read and understand the sacred Scriptures within the reach of every individual in our country." A moment's reflection will discover the comprehensiveness and simplicity of the design; and we hope to show in a few brief paragraphs, that it has been kept steadily in view through all the succeeding measures of the Society.

The first thing needful to secure sympathy and aid, was an organ of communication with the public, and this was provided in a monthly magazine of thirty-six pages, (*The Sunday-school Magazine*), which was published for seven years and then merged in a weekly sheet, in newspaper form.

The purpose of this publication was not only to make known the doings of the Society, from time to time, but to inform, encourage, and stimulate Sunday-school teachers in the discharge of their duties. With various modifications in size, price, and frequency of issue, this periodical has been continued until the present day;* and we hesitate not to say a more valuable repository of facts and principles, connected with the subject of religious education in our country, is not to be found. At the same time a periodical was commenced for young children, which has also, in some form, been continued to this time.†

The population of the United States at the birth of the institution, was twelve millions; and of these, three millions were supposed to be of an age to demand Sunday-school instruction, a large part of whom, it was believed, would have no religious teaching unless from that source.

The proper methods of organizing a school of this kind, the supply of teachers and of the information and implements needed in the prosecution of their labours, and the subjects and modes of teaching, were, of course, very imperfectly understood. The London Sunday-school Union, which had then an experience of a score of years and more, could

* Now "*The Sunday-school World*."

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furnish no very satisfactory precedents, because the social and religious institutions of that country differ so widely from ours; and the institution, with them, was partly designed to compensate for the absence of the means of instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, while ours contemplated *religious* instruction exclusively. Their schools embraced the neglected and inferior classes of children, while in ours all orders were received and cared for alike. The *First Day, or Sunday-school Society*,* which was established in Philadelphia in 1791, had in view the secular and moral, rather than the religious instruction of children.

The preparation of books of instruction, of various kinds, adapted to the ages of the pupils, had received some attention from the Sunday and Adult School Union. With the concurrence of two-thirds of its Board of Managers present at any meeting, books might be adopted or printed for the use of the schools, "except such as treat of disputed doctrinal points." But at the time of the transfer of its stock to the National Society, it had published only ten bound books, six of which are still retained on the Society's catalogue.

The new organization, like that which preceded it, and like the elder institution in London, was

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which the objects of the Society were everywhere regarded, the increased demand for books and other publications under its imprint, and the new openings for the labours of missionaries,* stimulated the managers and friends of the institution to new efforts. The practicability of carrying forward such an enterprise, by the combined labours of Christians of different communions, had been fairly tested. "The experience of your Board," say the managers, "in all the history of their official connection, has satisfactorily demonstrated that the grand leading principle on which this National Association of the friends of Sabbath-schools was originally based—an union in the great and cardinal points of Christian belief—is as practicable in operation as it is noble in principle; and time has but the more firmly cemented that bond, whose early rupture was so confidently predicted."†

It was at this period in the history of the Society's labours that a measure was adopted which has widely influenced the usefulness of Sunday-schools, and from which it will be seen that some suggestions of the present day, which have the credit of novelty, are not entitled to it. The

* The *Territory* of Michigan is reported this year as having one Sunday-school, with 22 teachers and 220 scholars.

† Fourth Annual Report.

practice of committing portions of Scripture to memory, was as old as the Jewish law.* It was common from the time "whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary," in families and even secular schools. Of course it would be a leading exercise in Sunday-schools, but as a mere achievement of memory it was of comparatively little value; and the whole time of a session was often absorbed in a vain and thoughtless repetition of words, by which a merit-mark was obtained; thus stimulating the exercise of a single faculty, without much impression on the mind or heart.

In view of this prevailing error, two or three thoughtful friends of the institution arranged a selection of forty-seven lessons, from the gospel history, in chronological order. Each embraced from ten to twenty verses, and they were published on cards. This limitation of the service of memory left time on the teacher's hands for explanations and interrogations, and thus revealed the necessity of skill and forethought in framing and adapting them to the attainments and capacities of the class. To aid them in this, a series of questions were devised by *Rev. Albert Judson*, then employed as an agent of the New York Sunday-School Union. In the arrangement of the questions the author had reference to three grades of

* Deut. vi. 7.

pupils. The *first* series were framed upon the words of the text, and were so plain and easy as to be answered by the least informed. The *second* series, requiring closer attention and more thought, suited the average endowments of a class; while the *third* series took a wider range, and brought to view parallel passages, and a personal application of the text. The teacher was required to apprise the class of the lesson for the succeeding Sabbath, and the *thorough commitment of the lesson to memory*, was a uniform and indispensable requirement. Two other important points were also urged. 1. That the teacher should study the lesson, faithfully, during the week; making himself familiar with the questions and their bearing, consulting such aids and authorities as might be at hand, and seeking wisdom and grace rightly to divide the word of truth. 2. That the pastor (when his engagements would permit), or the superintendent, should meet with the teachers during the week, and obtain by a lecture, or by mutual instruction, a good knowledge of the selected lesson for the following Sabbath. It will be seen that in these brief directions we have the sum and substance of what fifty years of experience show to be the chief requisites to a prosperous and efficient Sunday-school.

The introduction of this system of selected les-

sons and questions upon them, was an era of no ordinary importance. Nothing of the kind had been before provided, and the revolution it caused in the process of instruction, was, for a time, very marked. A correspondent of the (London) *Evangelical Magazine*, for December, 1828, attributes the remarkable "revivals of religion," then prevailing in the United States, first of all to "the superior mode of conducting Sabbath-school instruction. These nurseries of the church are not left," says the writer, "to well-meaning but inexperienced youth. They are assisted by Christians more mature and of good standing in the church. They are not confined to the children of the poor, but the children of the rich and the respectable part of the community, are sent to these hallowed exercises. Each school has visitors, publicly appointed, to look after absentees, and invite the attendance of those who have not been gathered in. The children are examined by the teachers, who use *Judson's* questions, so that the children are taught to *think*, not merely to *repeat*; by which they become well acquainted with the meaning of the sacred oracles. Their answers would astonish Christians of the Mother Country; and latterly they are brought into BIBLE CLASSES. The grandfather and grandchild are often seen in these admirable classes together. The results of these ex-

ercises are the wonder of the days in which we live—*multitudes are born again.*” If the gold has become dim, it may not be amiss to know it.

To show the vast expansion of a scheme so humble in its origin, it may suffice to say that the *American Sunday-School Union* now publishes seventeen Question Books on selected lessons, and a score or two of aids in the use of them; and under other imprints, probably twice that number of denominational or doctrinal Question Books, on substantially the same plan. The London Sunday-School Union issues a monthly periodical of 24 pages, 12mo, devoted exclusively to explanatory, expository, and practical notes on the lessons for the month. They are prepared with great care, and lay open the subject with a plainness and fullness which (we might fear) leaves nothing for the teacher to do. Similiar aid is given by the Church of England and the Scottish Unions to those who use the questions published under their auspices, respectively.

The views which were entertained at that early period, of the design and capacity of the Sunday-school, and of the methods of management and instruction, were quite as elevated and philosophical as are those which prevail now. A directory, found in the Appendix to the Third Annual Report of the Society, contains all the essential

features of the best schools now in existence, and they are summed up in a single sentence: "There must be neatness and order in every arrangement; vigilance, exactness, and decision in the practice and discharge of every duty; carefulness of example, affability of manner, and a kind and affectionate spirit in all intercourse and dealings between teachers, scholars, and parents."

The system of rewards had been in vogue long before the organization of the *American Sunday-School Union*. Indeed, in Mr. Raikes' schools, gratuities were given for attendance and good behaviour. But we do not find the ticket-currency, as it might be called, (that is, tickets of various values, redeemable with books,) was in use, except in our own country. Scripture tickets were given in British Sunday-schools,* as marks of approbation, and eight such tickets, received in the month, entitled the recipient to a copy of a Penny Monthly Magazine. But the system here was more complicated. A text of Scripture, printed on a card, with blue ink, was given as a reward for attendance all day, and good conduct; or for every thirty verses of hymns or Scripture recited, or for every four texts to prove a doctrine or duty. Six blue tickets were equivalent to one printed with red ink, and the red ticket was "valued in

* London *Sunday-School Magazine*, new series, vol. viii. 478.

exchange for books or tracts, according to the catalogue rates of the same." Or in cases where poorly clad children earned the tickets, they were redeemable with shoes, stockings, mittens, &c. When a book was received in exchange for these tickets, it was the recipient's exclusive property. The expense of this plan was very considerable in a large school, and where the pupils were of an age to expect something more than a penny tract. It was found also that there were great inequalities in the distribution of rewards, and the system gradually gave place to the circulating library, access to which was then regarded as a valuable privilege. This movement, though so inconsiderable in itself, led to very important results, as we shall see.

The whole number of bound books, suited for such a library, and published at that time by the *American Sunday-School Union*, was eighteen. A few additional volumes may have been made up of the tracts or paper covered books bound together. Outside of their catalogue it would probably have been difficult to find a dozen books suitable for such a purpose.*

* In the Appendix to the Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Society, is found a variety of curious letters from individuals residing in different parts of the country, giving the titles of books current among children in the preceding age. It is well worth reading and preserving.

The catholic principle on which the Society was organized, while it left the *schools* established by its agency unshackled by any restrictions, required the *books* it published to be free from sectarian controversy. If a company of children could be gathered for instruction, and competent persons could be found to take charge of them, it mattered not with what denomination of Christians the teachers fraternized. The Scriptures being the recognized text-book, the course of instruction, as well as the affiliation of the school, was left to those who conducted it. But the books with which it was supplied must have received the sanction of a committee, the members of which were of different religious denominations, and who were responsible to the public for the freedom from sectarian teachings of whatever bore the Society's imprint. It has often been maintained that such a compact must involve the exclusion of much essential truth. How far this objection is valid may depend, somewhat, upon the force of the word "essential." That the field left to the Society is not narrow, will be apparent when it is remembered that whatever the Founder of our faith taught, it teaches; and as plainly as he taught it. The supremacy and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as a rule of faith and duty; the lost state of man by nature, and his exposure to the

penalty of the divine law which he has transgressed; salvation by the free grace of God under the influence of the Holy Spirit, through the atoning sacrifice and prevalent intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ; the indispensableness of faith, repentance and godly living, together with a due observance of the ordinances of divine appointment, baptism and the Lord's supper, are freely and fully set forth in the Society's publications, and embrace the leading articles of the most general formula of faith known in Christendom,—the Apostles' Creed.

While the library was always regarded as quite subordinate to the school, it was nevertheless a very important appendage, and at that period constituted a very powerful attraction to the school. To parents as well as to children, it was a source of instruction and entertainment, and volumes of testimony to its benign influence could be collected. As most of the schools were sustained by voluntary gifts, and as those who were most active in conducting them, were seldom of the rich or conspicuous classes of society, the terms of sale were made as low as possible, and catalogues, with prices annexed, were circulated all over the land. It was not to be expected that the book trade would be attracted by the character of the books or the prospect of any profit upon them, so that their

general introduction to the schools must be accomplished by some special provision. Thus it came to pass that depositories were opened at various points most easy of access, and to a large extent, on the Society's capital. The number of these book agencies, as early as 1827, was sixty-seven. Pecuniarily, a more unprofitable scheme could scarcely have been adopted, but it served to scatter good books for children far and wide, and laid the foundation on which publishing societies and houses are now so largely building.

The transactions of the Society having become thus extended, and the managers justly considering that a personal responsibility for its debts and obligations was rather more than should be laid upon them, in addition to their voluntary labours in its behalf, an act of incorporation was sought, conferring no power save that of holding a limited amount of property, necessary for its business arrangements. It will scarcely be believed, at this day, that the application awakened a kind and measure of hostility that it would be difficult to match. It was affirmed by members of the Legislature, in their places, that it was a secret scheme to secure a permanent support for the clergy; that it was a plot to subvert the civil and religious liberties of the country, and establish an iron ecclesiastical despotism; that as the efforts of bigots

and fanatics to enchain the adult conscience had proved abortive, the attempt was now to be made upon the tender minds of children; and that, if the institution were invested with corporate powers, it would be but a little while before this giant, whose trunk was lying along the soil of Pennsylvania, while its limbs stretched afar to the very borders of the land, would rise up in his strength and crush out the vital breath of freedom!

It was in vain that the managers disavowed all such malevolent and traitorous designs. They might be very honest, and the opponents of their wishes disclaimed any reflections upon them. They were but tools of the infernal spirit whose secret machinations they were unconsciously furthering! It was in vain that the most extensive book publishers united in support of the application, because they regarded the Society as eminently useful in educating readers and diffusing a taste for books. The privilege of a simple charter was denied, and the institution lived and flourished nearly twenty years afterwards without legislative assistance.* It was with reference to this extraordinary and memorable proceeding, that the managers were led to make the very simple and eloquent declaration that, "to extend to every town and village of our vast country the blessings

* The present charter was granted in 1845.

of early instruction in virtue and knowledge, to circulate as widely as possible a class of publications designed to illustrate by example and to enforce by precept, those plain and simple gospel truths which are peculiar to no sect, but of vital importance to all—these are the objects, and to accomplish them will be the glory of the *American Sunday-School Union*.”*

The increase in the receipts of the Society had been from \$4,000 in the first year, to \$9,000 in the second, \$19,000 in the third, and \$58,000 in the fourth. Its working capital at the close of the fourth year was less than \$25,000, and it had contracted debts to the amount of \$35,000. The openings for the organization of schools in the (then) newly settled regions of the West, were greatly multiplied, and calls for missionary labour and books were incessant. So that at a meeting of delegates from various Sunday-school associations of fourteen different States, held in Philadelphia, May, 1828, the Board were urged to enlarge its plans so as to embrace every destitute district of the country, and were encouraged by generous promises of aid and by a voluntary subscription of nearly \$5,000 on the spot. During the succeeding year (1829,) the first permanent agency west of the Alleghanies, was established at Cin-

* Tenth Annual Report, page xi.

cinnati, and an exploring tour performed by one of the agents of the Society, with a view to a plan of missionary service; and in the following May, 1830, a resolution was passed at the public meeting connected with the sixth anniversary that "in reliance upon divine aid, the Society would, within two years, organize a Sunday-school in every destitute place throughout the Valley of the Mississippi, where it is practicable." The resolution was received very kindly by the friends of the Society, and liberal contributions were at once made, the subscriptions and collections in Philadelphia and New York alone, within a few days after the meeting, amounting to nearly or quite \$25,000.

In the absence of trained men to take in hand this great work, the Society was obliged to avail itself of such help as might offer. Active young men, full of ardour and enterprise, were naturally attracted to this field, and though doubtless many injudicious appointments were made, and some work done superficially, there is most conclusive and gratifying evidence that whatever moral strength, religious intelligence, and elevated personal social character, are this day found in the population of our Western and North-western States, must be credited in no small measure to the humble labours of these early Sunday-school

missionaries and the schools and books which were so widely spread over the prairies and along the river borders of that beautiful valley. There is voluminous documentary evidence, of the highest authority, to show that in extensive districts of that country no other means of religious instruction, for children or parents, were within their reach, save what a *Union* Sunday-school supplied; nor, indeed, would a population so heterogeneous and so at odds on religious doctrine and usage, welcome any other agency. If this were the place, it would be no difficult matter to point the traveller to scores and hundreds of villages and towns, now filled with a busy and thriving population, that once could offer no better shelter to a missionary than a log-cabin (and he wanted no better); and the oldest church organization there, will be found to have had its origin in the Sunday-school which that missionary planted, and the oldest church edifice there, is occupied on the Lord's day by men and women, now in the autumn of life, whose first religious impulses were felt under teachers whom he set to work!

The experiment of a weekly periodical of the full size of the leading newspapers of that day, was entered upon in the seventh year of the Society's life (1830-31), under the title of "*The Sunday-School Journal and Advocate of Christian*

Education." It took the place of the Monthly Magazine of 36 pp., which had been the organ of the Society from the beginning. This was the first periodical of the kind in our country. A large addition of books for library use, was also made, for the most part original; and other organizations now began to offer supplies for the same purpose, so that in the selection of books for libraries, there was need of discrimination to avoid such as were undesirable. Even at that early period we are told that a very efficient County Union in the State of New York, being about to establish a depot of Sunday-school books, for local purposes, appointed a commission to examine such as were offered for the purpose; and of eighty-five books examined—none of which bore the imprint of the *American Sunday-School Union*—twenty-three were at once rejected, and most of them because they inculcated sentiments at variance with the religion of the Bible.*

The voluminous report of the Society for the year 1831, enters fully into the principles of the publication department, vindicates the use of common and natural incidents for the illustration of truth, though not known to have actually occurred in the order or connection in which they appear; shows the surpassing economy of the Sunday-

* *Sunday-School Visitant*, Utica, N. Y., Vol. 1, page 98.

school as an educating agency; exhibits in brief the method of proceeding in the Western work, together with important statistical facts touching the paucity of the means of secular instruction; and presents the acknowledged fruits of the system, already gathered, as an unanswerable argument in behalf of more general and generous aid in extending it. The drafts upon the stock of books, made by the missionaries upon the field, were so heavy as to compel the Society to anticipate its receipts or to relinquish the undertaking, and we find that before the eighth year expired, loans had been contracted or authorized to the amount of nearly \$80,000!

In 1832 an effort was made to collect and compare the results of seven years' labour in this department of education, and to this end a meeting of teachers and superintendents was called, and held in Philadelphia on May 23. Delegates were present from fifteen different States, and their deliberations terminated in the adoption of a resolution "recommending to teachers and superintendents of Sunday-schools in the United States, to convene at some suitable time and place for the purpose of considering the principles of the institution, the duties of officers and the best plans of organization, instruction and discipline." A series of seventy-eight interrogatories, under thir-

teen different heads, was agreed upon, to be addressed to the parties interested, and a committee was appointed to receive the replies and condense and arrange them for the use of the proposed convention, which was held in New York in October following.

Much valuable information and many suggestions of great practical importance, were elicited by this proceeding; and when the convention assembled (October 10), the difficulty was to determine which of the various topics presented should be entertained. The late *Hon. Theodore Frelinghuysen* presided, and the sessions continued through three days. Some of the most important subjects were referred to committees, whose reports were published, and contributed much to strengthen the hands and encourage the labours of teachers. The answers to the interrogatories were published in several successive numbers of the (weekly) *Sunday-School Journal*, and a reference to them will show that in the intelligence, devotion, and practical good sense with which our Sunday-schools are conducted at this day, we have not made any very great advance upon our predecessors.

The earliest translation of the Society's books into foreign languages, was in 1833. They are now more or less known in French, German,

Greek, Swedish, Portuguese, Bengalee, and one or two other languages of India. An earnest appeal made to the Society by the "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions," for means of translating its books for the use of schools connected with their mission stations, led to the passage of a resolution to appoint some suitable agency for raising \$12,000, to be appropriated to this object. Not one-third of the sum was secured, but even with this, appropriations were made to various missions in India, Greece, Persia, Turkey, China, France, and the Sandwich Islands. Donations of books were also made to Christian missions in Ceylon and Orissa, and to friends of public instruction in South America, Russia, and Prussia. In Calcutta a depot was opened for the sale of the Society's publications, which was attended with gratifying success; two resident English gentlemen, connected with the public service, being its patrons. Letters are on file containing plenary evidence of the usefulness of these grants.

It was at this period that the Society's attention was directed to the work of establishing Sunday-schools in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, the District of Columbia, and the Territory of Florida; a resolution to that effect having been adopted in May, 1833. The territory occupied by these States was sup-

posed to have at that time about half a million of white children of suitable age to attend Sunday-schools. As a preliminary measure, a person* believed to be well fitted for such a work, was despatched upon a tour of observation. The necessity of the proposed effort was abundantly obvious, but as the first requisite suggested by his report, viz., the opening of numerous depositories, was impracticable with the Society's limited capital, the chief reliance was on the personal labours of missionaries. The peculiar social institutions and habits of the South proved a serious obstacle to their progress, and the suspicion and jealousy which were inwrought in the very structure of society there, were constantly and causelessly awakened. The contributions to this object were about thirty thousand dollars, of which sum nearly half was received from Virginia, Georgia and South Carolina, and the other half almost entirely from New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. In 1838 about three thousand dollars were expended on the Southern field in excess of the contributions, and it thenceforth ceased to be regarded as an object of special appropriations.

Though more interest was excited and larger funds may have been obtained by such a designation of particular fields of labour, it is by no

* The late Rev. Robert Baird, D.D.

means clear that the *principle* of beneficence is materially strengthened by it. When funds are low and sympathy flags, the temptation is very strong to set forth some new, distinct and popular purpose to which special attention shall be turned ; and, for a season, it attracts sympathy, but the reaction is unhealthy. Had the funds contributed under the resolution to supply the Valley of the Mississippi with Sunday-schools "in two years," been spread over eight years, the average contribution would have been thirteen thousand dollars per annum ; but in fact the average contributions for two years were twenty-five thousand, and for the other six years of the eight, (say) nine thousand. The disadvantage of such inequalities is the same in character though not so disastrous in effect, as if they occurred in the supplies of an army. Hence it may be safely argued that the success of the various agencies employed in the propagation of Christianity will depend (humanly speaking) upon the extent to which the PRINCIPLE of Christian benevolence is wrought into the habits and purposes of men ; so that what is now done under impulse and momentary excitement, shall be done from intelligent sympathy, under a conviction of duty, and will thence become a steady and permanent resource.

That a work of vast magnitude was accom-

plished by means so comparatively insignificant there is conclusive evidence.* The histories we receive from time to time of flourishing churches in the midst of busy populations, that took their rise in the humble efforts of those early Sunday-school missionaries, when as yet the country around them was a "waste, howling wilderness," bear testimony to it. The progress of general education since the day when the Sunday-school supplied the only means of even secular knowledge through wide regions of country, bear testimony to it; and what can so satisfactorily account for the spirit which has animated those Western communities in the present perilous crisis of our country, as their early training in those elementary principles of our faith, from which all true patriotism and humane sympathies must ever spring?

The publication of a child's paper, called the "*Youth's Penny Gazette*," was commenced in 1843. Grave doubts were entertained of its success, but they were soon dispelled, and now nearly or quite a score of such papers are issued by various societies and boards, most of them expensively and tastefully embellished, and distributing in the aggregate probably a million or more of copies every week throughout the year. If these little sheets are per-

* For a view of the breadth of this enterprise, and of the extent of its accomplishment, see the Fifteenth Annual Report of the Society.

vaded by a chastened religious spirit, such as a child can recognize, and serve at the same time to instruct and amuse the reader, it would be difficult to estimate their importance in moulding the thoughts of a generation. That they should be conducted with care and judgment, and upon proper responsibility, no one will question; whether they are or not, it is not our province to decide.

From time to time important issues have been raised by different parties, involving, in some degree, the essential principles of the Society's organization.

The world of professed Christians being divided into separate communities, distinguished by their peculiar doctrines or usages, it has been maintained that *not* to teach these doctrines or commend these usages, is to allow them to fall into neglect. Children and youth educated in Sunday-schools where no part of the teaching is directed to the different views of the ordinance of baptism, nor to prelacy, nor to perseverance and predestination, would (unless instructed in some other way) come into active life in entire ignorance on these subjects; and how would they know whether to become Baptists or Episcopalians, Presbyterians or Methodists? Would it not be better that the soil should have remained untilled, if no seeds can be scattered upon it, that shall

ripen into fruit for the ingathering by some of these different communions ?

There would be some plausibility in this objection if it could be shown, or if the presumption could be raised, that, but for the Sunday-school, these children and youth would have received the training which should prepare them for an intelligent adoption of one or the other of the different formulas of faith. The *American Sunday-School Union* has generally restricted its efforts to those localities in which other means of religious culture were not within reach, and the true question is whether instruction in those truths of divine revelation, which are held in common by all these Christian bodies, is not better, *even for their interest as denominations*, than ignorance of the whole subject?*

If the union Sunday-school opposed or obstructed or delayed the operations of ecclesiastical communities or single church organizations, so that they cannot do the things that they would in the way of indoctrinating the young in their distinctive principles, there might be strength in the objection ; but so far from this, the whole scheme of the Society's text books and aids to teachers, presupposes that each individual teacher will adopt such a course of instruction as his own conscience and

* There is a candid and somewhat extended examination of this point in the *Fourteenth Annual Report* of the Society.

intelligence shall prompt. But apart from this, those two grand agencies of divine appointment for the propagation and diffusion of religious truth, the FAMILY and the PULPIT, occupy a sphere to which the best of our Sunday-schools are quite subordinate, and indeed they cannot exist at all save with the concurrence of one or both. The missionaries of the Society, whether employed at the East or West, the North or the South, have only one thing to do, viz., to organize Sunday-schools in every destitute neighbourhood. Who shall be the superintendents and teachers must depend on the neighbourhood. What they shall teach it is no part of the missionary's duty to prescribe. The Bible is, of course, recommended as the grand reservoir of instruction, but the details are necessarily left to the conscience, intelligence and Christian fidelity of the teachers. If the school is in any sense denominational in its character, they are at liberty to give a corresponding complexion to the services and lessons; and if it is a Union school the like obligation is felt to direct the course of study in accordance with the catholic character of the school. So of the library. So long as the teacher of each group of six or eight children is left at liberty and is competent to inculcate such views of truth and duty, as a conscience enlightened by God's spirit and a heart sanctified by his grace shall prompt,

may we not hope that, so far as the Sunday-school is concerned, the whole duty of every man to his fellow-man will be fully and faithfully inculcated? And, may we not bid God speed to "the Society that takes care of those children" for whose religious culture other and better provision is not made, without any fear of its encroaching on ground assigned to other husbandmen, or hindering their labours?

Again there was a somewhat formidable attempt made at one time to excite the hostility of book publishers towards the Society, by representing that it used the contributions of churches and benevolent individuals, as part of its business capital, and thus, in its corporate capacity, possessed an illegitimate advantage over private dealers in books. However valid this objection may have been in relation to other publishing Societies against which it was urged, it had no force or relevancy when applied to the *American Sunday-School Union*.

From the organization of the Society the two departments of its business have been separated. The contributions to the missionary service, (viz.: the salaries and expenses of persons employed to organize and sustain schools, and to supply books to those who have not the means to supply themselves,) have been scrupulously appropriated to that purpose, and oftentimes the business or book

department has been seriously embarrassed (as the reports from year to year will show) by advances, in the shape of stock to missionaries in service, in anticipation of such contributions. No one can examine the successive catalogues of the Society and not perceive that the publishing department of its affairs has been managed with a view to do good, rather than to make a profit. The object, from the beginning has been to make the book agency subservient to the missionary enterprise, and it has been its steady aim to restrict the line of publications to the legitimate service of Sunday-schools. Among these we count books setting forth and enforcing the duties of parents and teachers ; scriptural text books for purposes of instruction ; maps, manuals, and various aids in the study and exposition of the Bible ; apparatus connected with the organization, order and discipline of schools of various grades ; and circulating libraries composed of narratives, biographies, histories and treatises upon those doctrines and duties of religion which constitute the staple of the Sunday-school teachings. So that it may be said with truth that the press of the *American Sunday-School Union* is but a hand-maid to the missionary and the teacher.

Hence, it happens that instead of investing its narrow capital, from time to time, in new books

for the sake of quick sales and re-investment, it retains books of singular merit from year to year and from generation to generation which no private publishing house would think of doing; and times without number, parents now seek for their children the very books which were the delight of their own childhood; and though as a matter of profit it may not "pay," yet as a matter of duty, utility and pleasure it doubtless pays abundantly to have copies of *Anna Ross, Pierre and his Family, Ruth Lee, The Broken Hyacinth, &c., &c.*, for the supply of such as find no equal charm in works of the same class of later date. It may be added that the American Sunday-school Union, though at least equally deserving such favour, has never been endowed, as other publishing societies have been, with a *business capital*. While it is asked and expected to respond liberally to all calls for donations of books to hospitals, refuges and asylums; to seamen; to reading rooms and to public libraries, it is very rare that a ten dollar donation is made to be applied to such purposes. The missionary service absorbs and demands all and much more than all the means at the disposal of the managers.

If the extent to which the Sunday-school has been instrumental in engendering a taste or imparting the ability to read could be measured, it would doubtless be found that the publishing in-

terest of the country owes it a debt which it would be no easy matter to pay. Some of the most distinguished and successful booksellers have more than once volunteered their emphatic testimony in this behalf.

The *American Sunday-School Union* may, perhaps, be regarded as the most careful of all our public institutions to keep within its constitutional limits. At the outset of its work it owned and worked stereotype plates of the Bible. It published a cheap edition of the New Testament for the use of schools, and also a reference Bible; but upon the organization of the *American Bible Society* and at its request, the publication of these was relinquished, and the supplies for Sunday-schools derived from New York. The *Sunday-School Union* also owned plates of a large number of popular religious tracts, but upon the organization of the *American Tract Society* and at its request, the publication of these was discontinued, in order that there might be no complication of interests or objects. Such courtesies, are as becoming in Christian associations as in private individuals, and should be duly reciprocated.

We have not space to advert to any other of the criticisms which have been passed upon the measures of the Society, but hasten to complete our review.

The first legacy to the Society, of which we have a report, was in 1845. Since that period some very liberal bequests have been made, but not by any means in proportion to the importance and breadth of its field of effort. That an institution so catholic in its character, and so intimately connected in its design and work with the elements of social virtue and prosperity, has shared no more largely in the testamentary benevolence of our country-men and women is not easily explained. Probably the quietness with which its work is done, and the little note which the busy world takes of the vast community that its work primarily affects, may have had some influence in producing this indifference. The nursery is too often left, even by Christian and considerate parents, to take care of itself. It may be found at no distant day, that it would have been sound economy to have expended more upon the nursery and the school-room and less upon prisons, almshouses and asylums.

It is a peculiar feature of American Sunday-schools that they embrace all grades of children. In other countries (without exception, it is believed) the benefits of the institution are restricted to the humbler classes. This will account in some measure for wide differences in the methods of conducting the schools, as well as for the differ-

ent estimation in which they are held. Some of the disadvantages under which our schools labour, may be attributed to the nature of our institutions. Discipline, regularity of attendance, order, &c., are not so easily secured; and a higher average of teaching talent and skill is indispensable and at the same time very difficult to reach. The prodigality with which the means of intellectual and religious culture are diffused in our country, seems to make the need of this supplementary agency quite doubtful to many, and hence less interest is felt in sustaining it.

Not so in the old countries, where each rank is welded to its proper degree on the social scale; and the privileges and opportunities of each are apportioned with rigid exactness. Nevertheless we have great multitudes upon our soil who, but for Sunday-schools, must be ignorant of the art of reading, strangers to public worship, and uninstructed in the elements of moral and religious truth. Our access to them is unobstructed by political or ecclesiastical intervention, and there is not a people on the globe whose very being is so inseparably interwoven as ours is with the intelligence and virtue which these schools are designed, and (under proper care) fitted to infuse. It is conceded on all hands, that the general taste for reading, which is so marked a feature in the native

population of the United States, is attributable in no small degree to them.

It has never been in the power of the best and wisest of men to exert an improving and elevating influence upon the less favoured classes of the community, to be compared in its power or adaptation, to that of which the Sunday-school is master. Two or three hundred thousand men and women, for the most part well informed and rightly disposed, having the assurance of a welcome at the homes of the two or three millions of boys and girls that occupy their Sunday-school forms from week to week, possess the means of opening doors, softening hearts, and awakening sympathies which no other agency can match. Whether they have the inclination or the skill to avail themselves of the opportunity remains, in a sad degree, doubtful. It cannot be for lack of a clear exposition of their duty in this behalf, nor of earnest exhortation to the discharge of it, that it is still so generally neglected. The institution, whose career we have noticed, has urged it in their reports, periodicals and manuals, as the primary obligation of teachers to become familiar with the HOMES represented in their classes.

And it is specially relevant in these pages, to refer to the vast amount of teaching power brought into activity by these schools, which would other-

wise have lain dormant. It is an approved axiom that "we learn by teaching;" and few persons have diligently employed whatever talents they possess for instructing others, without a conscious and rapid improvement of their own minds. The effort to obtain clear conceptions of truth, and to clothe them in words adapted to the capacity and comprehension of others, is an invaluable discipline.

It is undeniable that the thinking powers of the American people have been wonderfully stimulated of late years, and though we may regret that the excitement is, in so great a degree, transient and superficial—the product of impulse rather than of sober reflection—it is incomparably better and safer than indolence. Newspapers and magazines have unhappily supplanted books, and hence people are given much more to emotion and passion than to reflection; but ideas are caught, notions of right and wrong are formed, social obligations and interests are recognized, and the popular mind drifts towards the truth through currents setting strongly in the opposite direction. We are disposed to ascribe this wholesome tendency, in no inconsiderable degree, to the silent, humble influence of the Sunday-school. The gentle speech distilling from Christian lips every Lord's day upon so many thousand little groups of trustful and susceptible minds—to say nothing of acts of

kindness and sympathy filling up the intervening week—cannot fail to bring forth fruit. That it is not an hundredfold more abundant, is not to be attributed to want of power in the *system*, but to deficiencies and imperfections in the *administration*.

It is not our purpose or province to advertise or eulogize the *American Sunday-School Union*. Like individual sinners it has left undone some things that it ought to do, and has, very probably, done some things that it ought not to do. But we are disposed to think that its claims to the support and confidence of the country are not appreciated. To refer to but a single item, viz., one of its select libraries, specially designed for circulation in villages and family circles, hence called “The Village and Family Library.” It would be no easy matter, we apprehend, to collect in the same space or to purchase with the same money, an equal amount of really valuable reading. The volumes are of uniform size, about two hundred pages, 18mo. They are, nearly all, original works, written by authors of known ability in the scientific and literary world; popular in style, wholesome in moral and religious sentiment, acceptable in their prevailing spirit and character to all classes, and treating of subjects of universal interest, as biography, history, travels, art, science, and literature. By an arrangement with the foreign publishers for a

duplicate set of plates, the Society was able to produce that valuable collection of books in paper covers at 12½ cents a volume! This was, of course, before the advance in materials and labor. This library has often been examined with critical care, and though there may be points in which some modification might be useful or expedient, we know not where to look for a more unexceptionable collection of books for a school, academy, factory, village, reading-room or family, than this same product of the American Sunday-school Union's press.

As a fitting conclusion to this very cursory review, we give a few statistical items of interest. The disbursements of the Society during the forty years just completed, have been about *five millions* of dollars. When it is considered how large a portion of this amount has been employed in the manufacture and sale of little books, costing from half a cent to a dime, or in humble missionary labour in remote and secluded districts, the value of which is not seen till after many days, its moral influence will be better comprehended. The bookseller neatly wraps up a couple of octavo volumes, takes his five dollar note and turns to another eager customer, while a vacant place in the gentleman's library is gracefully filled with the new purchase. The same five dollars expended at the counter of the Sunday-School Union might involve the hand-

ling of half a hundred books, gathered from as many different shelves or drawers, and requiring an incredible amount of time and care to put them up; but if each item of that invoice represents a messenger of truth and love to some little, trustful heart, or a messenger of reproof and warning to some viciously disposed and neglected street-child, who will estimate by dollars and cents the value of the books or of the labour involved in giving them wings?

There are now on the latest catalogue of the Society's publications two thousand or more distinct publications, all directly in furtherance of the grand purpose of the Society, as an intellectual, moral, and religious educator. Of these, eight hundred and fifty are bound books for children's reading, or for the use of teachers and advanced pupils. Not less important, though less imposing, is the multitude of little story and picture books which do not aspire to self importance, but are swift-winged on errands of pleasure and profit to the little busy bodies that are always in somebody's way. Under the heads of aids for teachers, hymn and music books, maps, prints, rewards and record books, there seems to be a supply for all reasonable wants in those lines, respectively. Of the four select cheap libraries of one hundred volumes each, the circulation has

been very large. More than FIVE MILLIONS of bound volumes have been circulated *in this form alone*, involving an actual outlay of at least six hundred thousand dollars, and we need not say that at ten cents* a volume, (which is the average price), the advance upon the cost must be merely nominal, if indeed there is not a sacrifice.

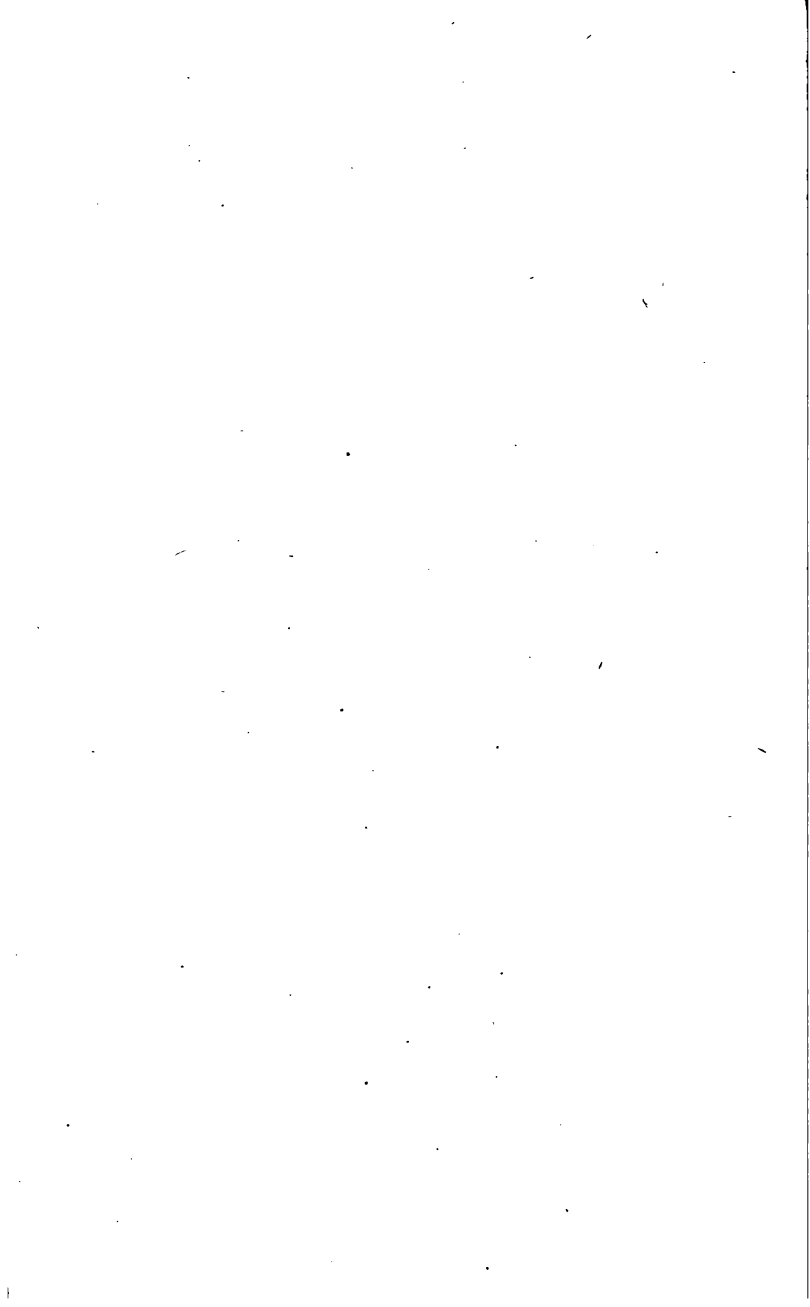
We are confident that the catholic principle upon which the institution is based, and the general scope of its plans entitle it to a much larger share of the favour and sympathy of the country than it has enjoyed; and so far as we are cognizant of its leading measures, we are free to commend its aims and methods of working to our fellow-citizens, and especially to those who are studying the things that concern the peace of the community and the purity and permanency of our free institutions.

In the preceding sketch we have restricted our inquiries very much to the earliest, and, indeed, the only Sunday-school institution of a general character in our country. We have not designed, however, to disparage, at all, other organizations of a denominational or local character, that have in

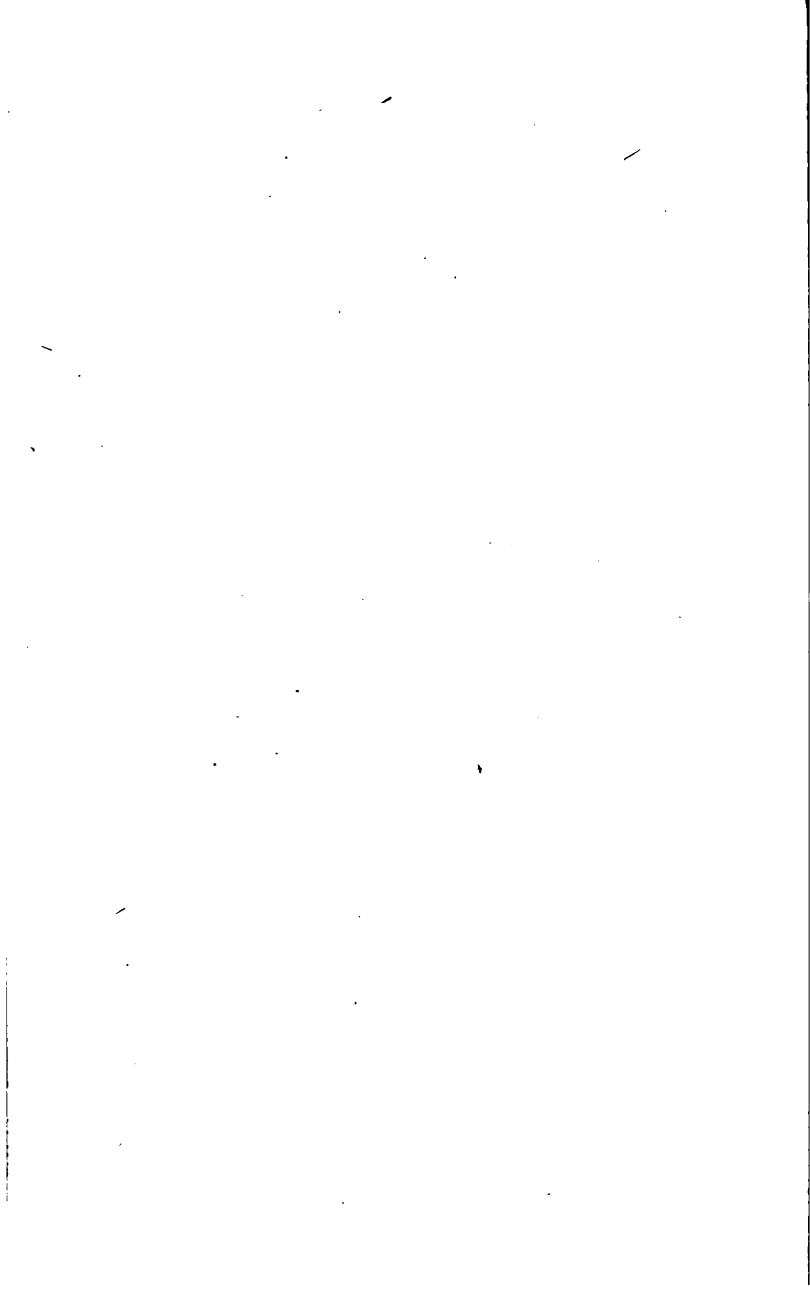
* It seems that the rise in the cost of materials and labour has demanded an increase to sixteen cents, or \$16 for each library of one hundred volumes.

view the same general purpose—*the religious education of the young*.

It is to be regretted that we have so few reliable data on which to form any estimate of the actual numbers in attendance upon Sunday-schools in the United States. The very loose way of keeping the roll of most of our schools, renders it impracticable to obtain authentic or accurate returns even from small districts. This slipshod way of dealing with statistical matters seems to be characteristic of our nature, which we may hope to outgrow.

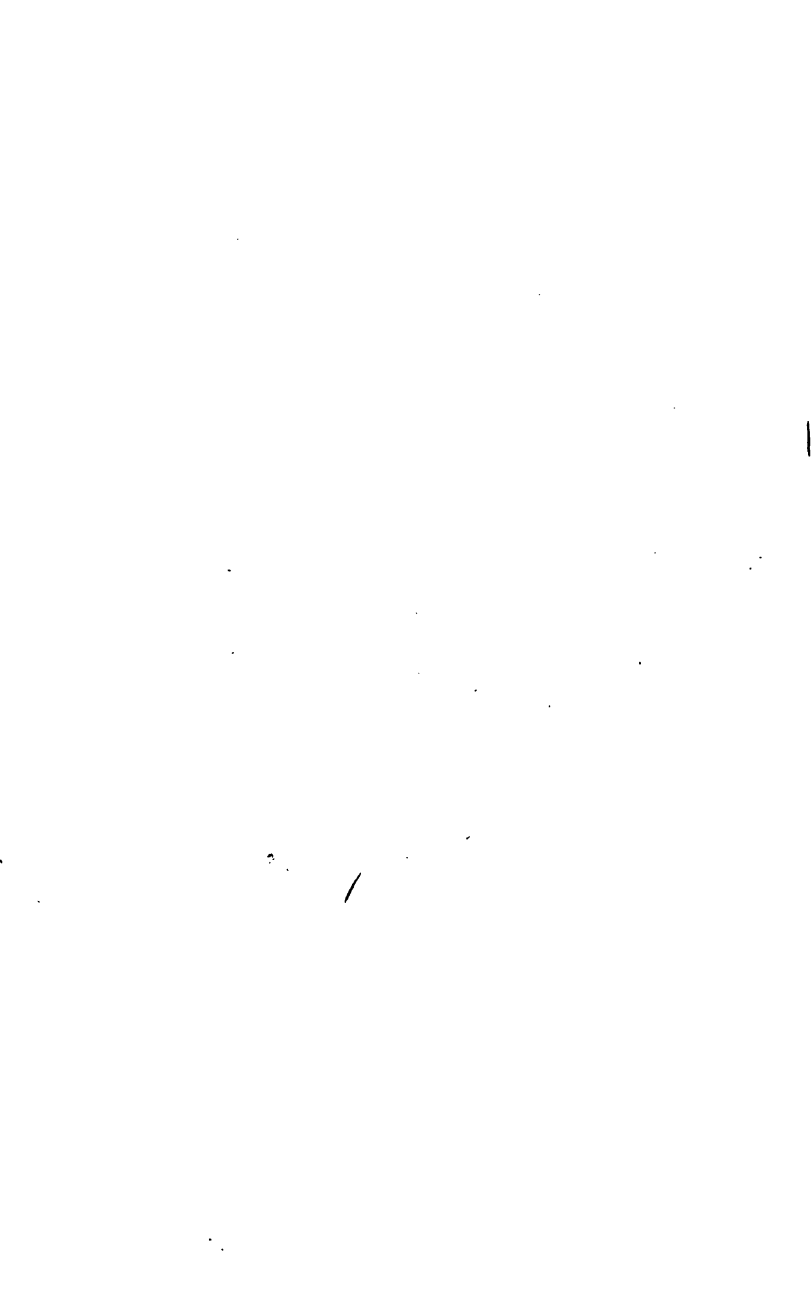












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